



By Harry Naltchayan—The Washington Post
The Rev. Edmund Ryan stands before the chapel at Georgetown University.

Bedeviled by Film, Curious Go to GU

By Cathe Wolhowe
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The campus of Georgetown University, a kind of sanctuary on a hilltop overlooking the Potomac River for almost two centuries, is recording an unusual influx of the curious these days.

Two weeks after a movie about a Georgetown University priest casting the Devil from a person opened

in 20 American cities, the university has been recording its own crowds wanting to see where it all started.

The movie, "The Exorcist," is based on the actual exorcism of a Mt. Rainier boy, which involved the university in the late 1940s. (The exorcism was successful.) The movie, with many shots filmed on the university's campus, is taken from the best-selling novel by Georgetown graduate, William Peter Blatty, who was a junior at the time of the actual exorcism.

"People are coming from all over to see the chapel, to hear mass, to discuss exorcism," says the Rev. Edmund G. Ryan, S.J., executive vice president for university educational affairs.

"I've even been asked whether the Jesuits produced the movie as publicity, and I answer with a resounding, 'No.' " he said.

Father Ryan, as well as seven other priests interviewed at random in the past few days, voiced the same fear about publicity. They say they are afraid it may result in a wave of exaggerated belief in demonic possession.

"We've received numerous calls wondering about a cousin, sister, or other relative, whether they might be possessed." Father Ryan says. All the calls, he says, are referred to parish priests, who are required by the Catholic Church to make an independent determination and, if necessary,

See EXORCIST, C2, Col. 6

Bedeviled by 'The Exorcist,' Filmgoers Are Drawn to GU

EXORCIST, From C1

bring the case to the presiding bishop.

The small Dahlgren University Chapel of Georgetown is one of the few places on the campus that is keeping record of the calls. According to staff member Elizabeth Barchers, the chapel has received six requests, "one from as far away as Kansas."

"It's hard to distinguish between a natural curiosity and a real rise in the manifestations," Father Ryan says, adding that he has never seen a genuine case of possession, but believes in the possibility.

"Evil spirits could dominate a body, but never the soul," he says. "And the spirits can manifest themselves by spastic movements or hysterical convulsions, speaking in strange tongues, having extraordinary strength and knowing of things that can't be known."

But another University psychologist, the Rev. Juan B. Cortes, disagrees with Father Ryan, saying that demons do not exist and exorcisms should never be performed because they are psychologically harmful.

The Jesuit priest points out that the ancient 27-page ritual requires several hours to conduct and sometimes "the terrifying treatment must be continued for years before the situation can be ended."

And the time, not the exorcism, "is often all that's needed to keep demons at bay," he says, pointing to one female patient who asserted that she had made a

pact with the Devil and was possessed.

"The cure did not come from my counseling, from henbane, or bishopswort, or from any sort of mumbo-jumbo rite," he said. "Most of the fear simply disappeared when she got married and had three children. Today she just doesn't have time to be possessed any more."

And he believes the Mt. Rainier boy exorcised in 1949 should have been treated for epilepsy and coprolalia, a disease resulting in inability to control torrents of obscene words.

The Spanish born priest is quick to admit that he believes in the Devil, adding however, that there is no basis for believing Satan can ever enter inside a person.

The movie, he says, is "a victory for the Devil, because people will believe he actually can possess them and even cause death. That's never been so since the resurrection."

The problem has been created, he says, because the gospel has been translated with Devil and demon being used interchangeably. Illnesses attributed to demonic cause in Biblical times, he says, now would be called "organic brain disorders" and be treatable, just as any other of the supposed demonic possession cases.

But the most recent issue of National Jesuit News reports that another exorcism has been performed—this time in an unnamed city to relieve an entire family of strange happenings.

The Rev. Karl Patzelt S. J. of the Catholic Russian Center of San Francisco, performed seven ceremonies between Aug. 16 and Sept. 2 and seven more between Sept. 4 and 18 before the family was considered "at peace."

When Father Patzelt first visited the home in July, he says he found "ceilings covered with black marks from flying shoes, broken windows everywhere, and in the two bathrooms, the towels had been put on fire and had damaged the wallpaper behind them."

During the exorcisms, he says "people were knocked down or unconscious, choked, or had their arms twisted behind their backs." By touching them with the cross, he says they were immediately brought back to consciousness.